

NEBRASKA history news

Downtown style: Three new National Historic Districts



What do Grand Island, Kearney, and Neligh have in common that makes them nationally noteworthy? All three have downtown historic districts recently added to the National Register of Historic Places.

In each city, local citizens initiated the nominations. The Nebraska Historic Preservation Board evaluated each based on

architectural and historic significance before recommending them to the National Park Service for this prestigious honor.

David Calease of the State Historic Preservation Office at the NSHS explains what makes each district special. Read more and see photos from each city [here](#).



And now that we've got you in the mood for historic buildings...

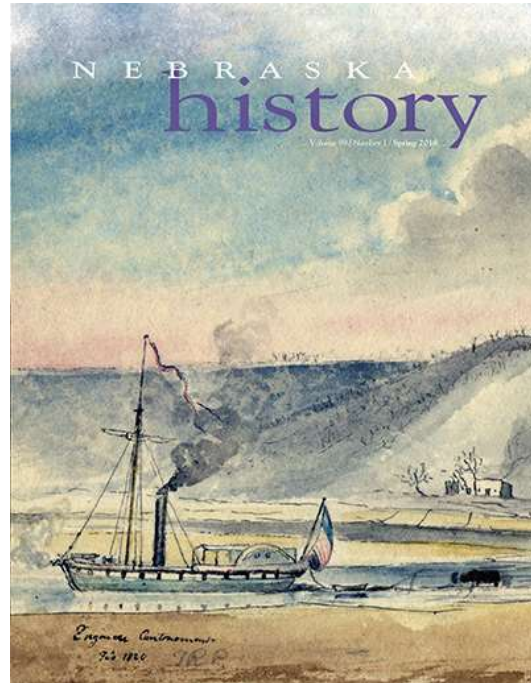
It's not too late to [register](#) for the conference to be held at Metropolitan Community College's Fort Omaha campus. Cost is \$50, with discounts for Restoration Exchange and NSHS members. If you missed last month's article about the conference, read it [here](#).

It's almost here!

The special "Engineer Cantonment" issue of *Nebraska History* mails to NSHS members in mid-March.

Though it's taking longer than usual to print, it'll be worth the wait.

Meanwhile, we're preparing online content with selected images and short versions of stories related to the Stephen Long Expedition. We begin now, with a post titled, "What is Engineer Cantonment? And why is it so cool that we found it?" [Read on.](#)



SOMETHING IS HAPPENING.



WHEN:
March 3 2018
2:00-4:00 pm

WHERE:
NEBRASKA HISTORY MUSEUM
131 Centennial Mall North
Lincoln, Nebraska 68508

Upcoming events

We've got a busy month planned in Lincoln, at Chimney Rock, and Omaha, with events for adults and kids (and even for those big kids known as library and museum professionals, who are invited to our digital preservation assessment workshop on March 1). We're continuing popular events such as Noon History Bites, our popular Brown Bag lectures, Free Family Fun Days, and we'll have Irish dancers on St. Patrick's Day.

As part of our [Looking Past Skin](#) exhibit, we're hosting Community Dialogs with the Yazidi and Karen communities, plus a Science Cafe-After Hours Panel Discussion about Nebraska's Indian boarding school past.

In western Nebraska, don't miss "Sunday Afternoons at the Rock" at [Chimney Rock National Historic Site](#).

Can't make it to these events? Our Brown Bag lectures may be on your local public access TV channel, and they're available on our [YouTube](#) page. And if you follow us on [Facebook](#), we're starting to stream events on Facebook Live.

See our [Events Calendar](#) for details.



WWI, Omaha, and eBay

NSHS member Oliver Pollak has been searching eBay to collect items related to Omaha during the First World War. He writes about the process and shares some of his favorite discoveries [here](#).

Check Your Bags? Scenes from the Ogallala Railroad Depot

A series of photos shows how railroad baggage was handled (or mishandled) in about 1900. Ah, the romance of travel by train!

[Read more](#).



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Downtown Style: Three New National Historic Districts



By David Calease

Three Nebraska downtowns are destined for the [National Register of Historic Places](#). Grand Island, Kearney, and Neligh were all nominated for listing in the National Register, at the September meeting of the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Board. Their listing is now pending approval by the National Park Service.

Photo above: Detail of a column capital on the Andrews Building, 2100 Central Avenue in Kearney. The building dates to 1889-90 and was later known as the Downing-Bartlett Building.

Local citizens initiated the three nominations by [contacting the Nebraska State Historical Society](#), which then contracted with private firms to research and assess the nominated districts. The assessments identified the significance and integrity each district retained. All three show the economic development of their communities from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries.



A 1915 postcard showing Grand Island's Third Street. NSHS RG3451-3-12

The Grand Island Downtown Historic District, centered on a six-block stretch of West 3rd Street, includes smaller segments along East South Front Street and West 2nd Street. Since its initial development in the 1870s, this section of Grand Island has served as the commercial center of town. Throughout the district, one- to three-story brick commercial buildings with flat roofs are common, with large storefront windows and cornice ornamentation.

The district was also nominated to the Register for its architectural significance. Its eclectic mix of architectural styles embody the characteristics of nearly a century of commercial building types.



Originally known as the Robertson Block, Kearney's Henline Building housed First National Bank on the ground floor and the Masonic Lodge on the second.

The Kearney Downtown Historic District encompasses roughly five square blocks of the historic downtown core along Central Avenue, from 19th Street to 24th and 25th Street. The district contains ninety-nine contributing resources and four individually listed properties.

From 1875 to 1965, this area was the commercial center of Kearney. As transportation routes changed, so did commercial development. Now, much of downtown resembles the look and feel of the previous eras. The district represents multiple decades, where late nineteenth-century brick facades and 1950s slip-covers together illustrate the greater story of Kearney's economic evolution.



Neligh's New Moon Theater was built after its predecessor, Moon Theater, was destroyed by fire in 1944.

The Downtown Neligh Historic District is the smallest of the three district nominations. Of its fifty-five properties, forty-one contribute historically to the district. Most of the represented building forms are one- and two-part commercial blocks of utilitarian architectural style with subtle stylistic influences. The dense streetwalls in the district's center illustrate the growth of Neligh's commercial core and represent a typical downtown streetscape of the early commercial centers. The variety of businesses once housed here reflects the needs of what was a thriving commercial center.

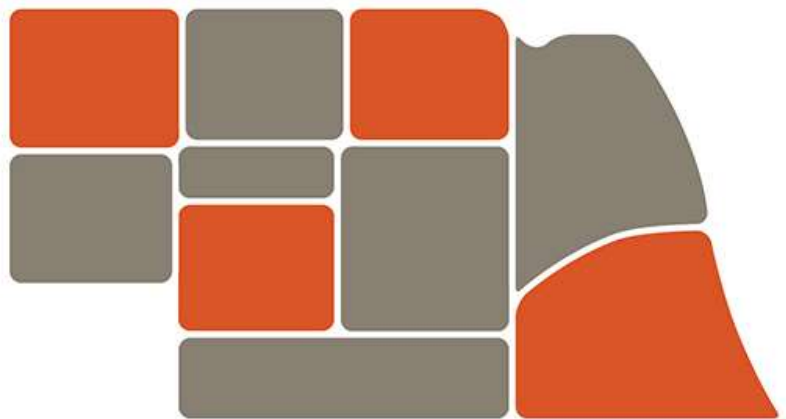
Listing in the National Register of Historic Places not only recognizes significant historical development but makes each city eligible for the State Tax Credit program and Federal Tax Incentives. These incentives simultaneously promote redevelopment and preservation, ensuring a vibrant commercial core for each of these communities for years to come.



Another view of Neligh, with the New Moon Theater, and the Atlas Bank at right.

Nebraska Historic Preservation Conference, March 2-3, 2018

January 25, 2018



Nebraska Historic
Preservation Conference

Omaha | March 2-3 | 2018

PRESENTED
BY



Now in its 13th year, the historic preservation conference you know and love has a new name and a new look.

Restore Omaha is now the Nebraska Historic Preservation Conference. Restoration Exchange Omaha and the Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS) are partnering to offer education and motivation to restore, revive, and preserve our great older homes and buildings.

“We are thrilled to partner with Restoration Exchange Omaha to support the preservation and revitalization of Nebraska’s historic buildings. Historic preservation strengthens communities and supports economic development,” said Trevor Jones, director and CEO of the NSHS.

“We’ve long admired REO’s work and are excited by what we can do together to support preservation efforts statewide.”

The two-day event will open Friday, March 2, with morning training for Nebraska’s preservation leaders. After lunch, representatives from P.J. Morgan and Dundee Bank will lead tours of restoration projects along Omaha’s Blackstone and South 13th Street commercial districts from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. Friday evening attendees can tour the building where the modern-day parachute was invented, 1501 Howard St., and end at 1316 Jones St. for tours, cocktails and hors d’oeuvres.

Saturday’s conference will feature Amy Nicole Swift, owner and founder of Building Hugger in Detroit. Swift is passionate about creating skilled jobs and providing more accessible preservation trades services. She, along with a panel representing Metropolitan Community College and local tradespeople, will talk about the importance of training the next generation of tradespeople.

Omaha World-Herald’s Matthew Hansen and Sarah Baker-Hansen will open the conference talking about their travels throughout Nebraska, uncovering the stories happening in older buildings.

Attendees also can choose from 18 breakout sessions. Topics include restoring old windows, plaster repair and appropriate kitchen and bath remodels, financing for historic restorations, and small towns that are bringing new life into their downtown main streets.

About 30 exhibitors, including craftsmen, history organizations and business and community groups, will be on hand to answer questions and share information. The conference will conclude with the popular Restore Jam, in which attendees are invited to share before-and-after photos of their own restoration projects.

“I appreciate the networking, the stories of buildings saved, the sharing of resources and the enthusiasm for all things old and worth saving,” said a 2017 conference attendee.

[Register online](#) beginning February 2, or call (402) 679-5854. Discounts are available for members of Restoration Exchange and the NSHS.

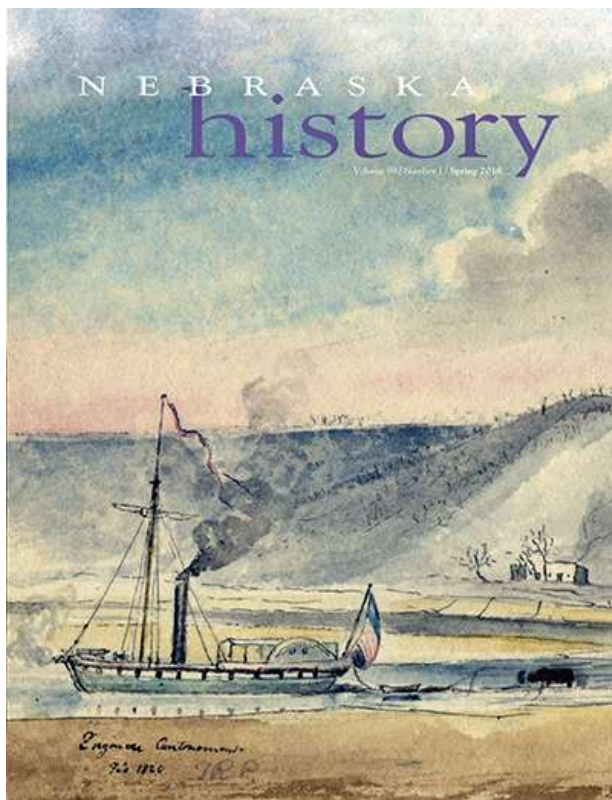
See you there!

Major support provided by First National Bank, AO, Metropolitan Community College and Hotel Deco.

What is Engineer Cantonment?

And why is it so cool that we found it?

February 22, 2018



Back in 2003, NSHS archeologist Gayle Carlson quipped (in his usual deadpan way) that he could “die in peace, now that Engineer Cantonment has been found.”

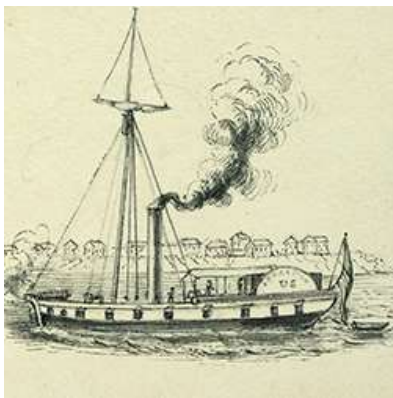
He was joking, but only in part. He was truly thrilled that this long-lost Missouri River site had been re-discovered. But why? And why are we now devoting an entire issue of [Nebraska History](#) to it?

The short answer is that it’s a story of exploration and discovery, of diplomacy with Native American nations, of science and art, and of the detective work of archeology.

Here are the highlights. In the coming weeks we'll share stories, images, and objects online related to each of these topics:



The Expedition. North of present-day Omaha, Engineer Cantonment was the winter quarters of the 1819-20 Stephen Long Expedition. At that time, what is now Nebraska was part of the vast Missouri Territory. The nearest city was St. Louis, which had only 10,000 residents and was weeks of travel away. Maj. Long led a team of scientists up the Missouri River to study the land and its people. The men wintered at Engineer Cantonment, and in the spring traveled overland west to the Rocky Mountains and back.



The name. It's fitting that "Engineer Cantonment," sounds both modern and old-fashioned. "Cantonment" is an old word describing a longer-term military

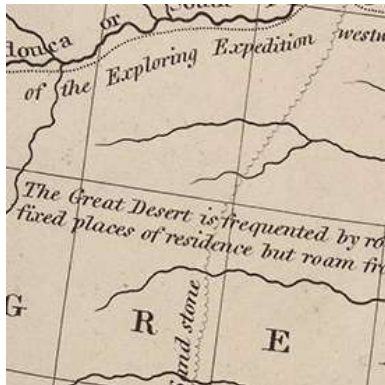
encampment, such as a winter quarters. “Engineer” in this case refers to the *Western Engineer*, a steamboat built specially for the shallow, muddy Missouri River. Steamboats were the latest in technology. The *Western Engineer* was one of the first stern-wheelers ever built. It was the first steamboat to ascend the Missouri.



The science. The Long Expedition was the first time the US government sent a team of trained scientists and artists on an exploring mission. While the land and its plants and animals were well-known to the Native peoples who lived here, it was little understood by Americans. Long’s men conducted what today’s biologists would call a biodiversity inventory—the first time this was done in the United States. Their data provides a valuable snapshot of what the local ecosystem was like before it was drastically altered by Euromerican settlement. The team described several ‘new’ species previously unknown to science—including the coyote. The group’s artists, meanwhile, made highly accurate paintings and sketches of the land, its animals, and some of the local people.



The fur trade. The US government didn't sponsor this expedition out of simple curiosity. There was power and money at stake. The river economy was built on the fur trade. Native tribes bartered furs for manufactured goods from British and American traders. The US was trying to push the British traders out. Long held councils with local tribes to try to win their loyalty. Meanwhile a military expedition under Col. Henry Atkinson was coming to build permanent forts along the river. One of these was Fort Atkinson, now reconstructed as a [Nebraska state historical park](#).



The “desert.” The Long Expedition was best known for its 1820 overland journey west along the Platte River to the Rocky Mountains. The expedition produced a map labeling Nebraska as the “Great American Desert”—a name that appeared on maps for decades. The party's geographer referred to the region as “almost wholly unfit for cultivation, and of course, uninhabitable by a people depending upon agriculture for their subsistence.”



The archeology. Engineer Cantonment was lost for nearly 200 years. Nothing was visible above ground, and many people thought the site had probably been swept away by the ever-shifting channel of the Missouri River. NSHS archeologists re-discovered the site in 2003 by using old paintings, a trenching machine (normally used to bury cable), and test excavations to confirm the site.

Once the excavations began in earnest, archeologists recovered numerous artifacts from the expedition—buttons, pipes, knives and cutlery, broken china, trade beads, gun flints, and other detritus, including the foundations of one of the buildings where the men spent the winter. In all, it helps fill in the picture of what the men were doing and how they lived.

“Science and Survival at Engineer Cantonment,” a special issue of *Nebraska History*, will be published in March 2018. You can receive *Nebraska History* part of your [NSHS membership](#). Single copies are available via the [Nebraska History Museum](#), 402-471-3447.

Something is Happening

February 22, 2018



What, you clicked here thinking we're going to tell you what this is all about?

We will, but not yet. Soon.

Check Your Bags? Scenes from the Ogallala Depot

February 28, 2018

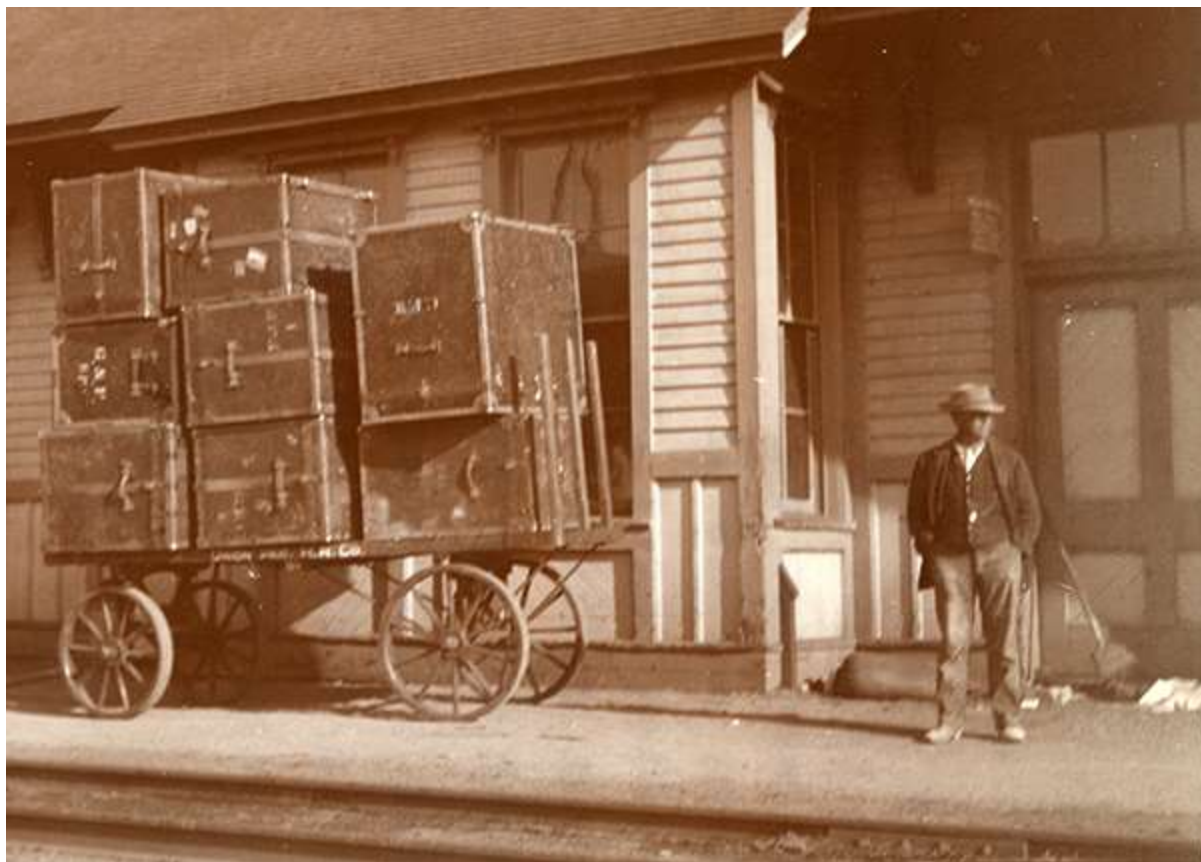


Among the thousands of railroad photos in our collections is a series shot outside the Union Pacific Depot in Ogallala around 1900. The photos were apparently meant to document how luggage and freight was commonly stacked outside the building, loaded on tall wagons, or simply piled beside the tracks. Details of a few of the photos are shown here.

It was probably a good thing it didn't rain a lot in western Nebraska.



The Depot. The sign lists Ogallala's elevation as 3,211 feet and gives distances "To Omaha 341 5/10 M" and "To Ogden 658 7/10 M." NSHS RG2105-3-56



Luggage wagon. NSHS RG2105-3-36



The depot is immediately to the left of this detail. NSHS RG2105-3-38



Looking like they've been literally kicked out of a boxcar, these boxes include products from the National Biscuit Company (aka, Nabisco), and apricots from the Golden State Canning Company of Ontario, California. NSHS RG2105-3-43